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THE DISCOVERERS OF LAKE SUPERIOR.

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In the year 1634, Jean Nicolet, a young Norman trained in the Huron mission, pushed through the Straits of Mackinac, visited Green Bay, and opened up a traffic with the Indians of that region. Returning to Three Rivers, he maintained on behalf of the Canadian fur monopoly whose agent he was, an ascendancy over the remote tribes of Indians who came down from the great lakes to the annual French market. He was drowned in the St. Lawrence in 1643, and left among both the traders and the Jesuits a name honored alike for sagacity and for piety.*

A year before Nicolet's death, Medard Chouart had come from Charly St. Cyr, France, and had entered the service of the Jesuit missionaries of the Huron mission.† In 1646, Chouart left the missions to engage in the fur

* Benj. Suite, *Mélanges d'Histoire et de Littérature*. Ottawa, 1876. Vimont, *Relation of 1643*, p. 2.

Wisconsin Historical Collections, Vol. XI. See article by Henri Jouan; and bibliography of Jean Nicolet, by Consul Willshire Butterfield.

† *Voyages of Peter Esprit Radisson, being an account of his travels and experiences among the North American Indians, from 1653 to 1684*. Transcribed from the original manuscripts in the Bodleian Library of the British Museum. With historical illustrations and an introduction by Gideon D. Scull, London, England; Boston, published by the Prince Society, 1886. This fascinating work will repay the pains that must be taken to master the rambling, confusing narrative written in English by one who was but imperfectly acquainted with the language. Mr. Scull's introduction is valuable, among other reasons, because it is the interpretation of one who has carefully studied the Radisson manuscripts, and, so far as it goes, is a natural interpretation of Radisson's narrative.

trade, an occupation for which he had decided talent. He prospered, bought land, married (1647) for his first wife a daughter of that Abraham Martin who gave name to the Plains of Abraham, and assumed the name of "Sieur des Groseilliers." Groseilliers, as he was afterwards called, was living at Three Rivers in 1651, when Peter Esprit Radisson, a youth of adventurous disposition, came to that frontier settlement from St. Malo. During the following year, Radisson was captured by the Iroquois, from whom he escaped to the Dutch at Fort Orange, and was by them sent to Holland, whence he made his way back to Three Rivers. On his return, in 1654, he found that during his absence Groseilliers (whose first wife had died in 1651) had married his sister, an event which was to link their fortunes for life; and two years later Radisson himself is supposed to have married. If so, married life involved no hostage to fortune; and from a chance remark of his it would seem that his affections were bestowed impartially on his own wife and on the wives of his neighbors. Love of adventure seems to have been his ruling motive, and when in 1657 the Iroquois, beset by foes from the southwest, found it for their advantage to make peace with the French, Radisson made one of the party that accompanied the Jesuits to the newly founded Onondaga mission. The mission was so much of a failure that it was secretly abandoned on the night of March 20, 1658. Returning to Three Rivers, Radisson found his brother-in-law planning an extended journey to the upper lakes, an expedition for which the times were made propitious by the fact that, comparatively speaking, the Iroquois were occupied elsewhere.

During the twenty-one years that had elapsed since Nicolet returned from Lake Michigan, no Frenchmen

had passed through the Straits of Mackinac.* The war of extermination† that the Iroquois had waged against the Hurons had made the country between the Ottawa and Lake Huron extremely dangerous alike to the fur trader and the Indian. The trade, intermittent at best, was in the hands of the Indians who, as it was to transpire, met their brethren near the shores of Green Bay and purchased from them the peltries that they ran through the Iroquois blockade on the Ottawa, and exchanged at the French markets on the St. Lawrence. Familiar, doubtless, with the travels and the financial success of his townsman, Nicolet, Groseilliers planned to follow in his path; and his familiarity with the Huron country (from which he had last returned but a few months before) made this plan the most feasible one he could adopt.

About the middle of June, 1658,‡ Groseilliers and Radisson set out from Three Rivers "to discover the great lakes that they had heard the wild men speak of." Besides the Indians returning from the fur market, there

* It is possible that some information may yet transpire to disclose the identity of the two fur traders who, according to the Relation of 1655, made a voyage of five hundred leagues to the northwest in their "gondolas of bark," and it is possible that, as Winsor says, (Cartier to Frontenac, p. 180), they penetrated the country beyond Lake Michigan. It is probable, however, that had they made so extended a voyage some definite account of their travels would have been made. Neither the Jesuits nor the government overlooked such explorations. Radisson says that Groseilliers was familiar with the great lakes; but the context shows that his personal knowledge was confined to the eastern shores of Georgian Bay. Suite's conjecture that Groseilliers and Radisson were the traders referred to seems to me unwarranted.

† Parkman's Jesuits in North America, p. 411 et seq.

‡ Radisson says that he and Groseilliers started northward about the middle of the June after his return from Onondaga. For a most ingenious discussion of the Groseilliers-Radisson chronology, see an article by Henry Colin Campbell in the American Historical Review, Vol. I, No 2. Mr. Campbell argues that Groseilliers and Radisson were the two Frenchmen mentioned in the Relations of 1660 as having returned that year, after having spent the winter on Lake Superior, that Radisson made but one trip to Lake Superior and that this one ended in 1660.

were in the party about thirty Frenchmen anxious to make their fortunes. The French, unaccustomed to the discipline of the forest march, repeatedly exposed themselves to attacks by the stray parties of Iroquois who waylaid the portages in search of plunder and victims. The natural result was a conflict, in which thirteen of French were either killed or captured. Disheartened by their costly victory, the remaining whites, excepting only the two brothers-in-law, set out on their return. Gros-eilliers and Radisson, thoroughly inured to hardship and fatigue, kept on with the red men and in time came to Georgian Bay. There the party divided, one going north to Sault Ste. Marie, and the other keeping to the south. The two adventurers, accompanying the latter party, coasted past the former mission stations of the Jesuits, and, still hugging the shores of the bay, came at last to Great Manitoulin Island.

It was Radisson's belief that they circumnavigated Lake Huron. Had they done so, they must have discovered the great St. Clair river; they would have been perplexed by Saginaw Bay, and the passage across the lake to Great Manitoulin would have given them trouble.* Nor would the time actually occupied have been sufficient for so long a navigation. Undoubtedly they simply made the circuit of Georgian Bay; and a glance at the map will show how natural Radisson's mistake was. After a short stay on the island and a visit to the "stairing haire" (Ottawa), whose home also was on Great Manitoulin, they pushed on through the Straits of Mackinac to the homes of the Pottawatomies, who dwelt on the islands at the mouth of

* Campbell argues the improbability of Radisson's narrative from the difficulty of crossing Lake Huron in a canoe. This objection disappears when we assume that Radisson simply followed the shores of Georgian Bay.

Green Bay and upon the western shores of Lake Michigan. There they spent the winter; and in the spring of 1659, they accepted an invitation to visit the Fire Nation (Mascoutins) on the Fox river.* From the Mascoutins the travelers learned of the Sioux.

"Among others," says Radisson, "they told us of a nation called Nadoneceronon (Sioux), which is very strong, with whom they were in warres with, and another wandering nation, living only upon what they could come by. Their dwelling was on the side of the salt water [Hudson's Bay] in summer time, and in the land in the winter time, for it's cold in their country. They call themselves Ochristinos." The men of the Fire Nation also invited their French guests to accompany them to the annual market near Green Bay, where the men of the Nation of the Sault brought French knives to trade for skins.

To the Frenchmen this was an interesting piece of information. They were well acquainted with the Sault Indians, for they had come up with some of them, and had parted with them at Georgian Bay. It transpired that the Indians who had gone north made the passage through St. Mary's river and thence to the head of Lake Superior, whither the Iroquois had forced the former dwellers at the Sault to retire. Evidently these Indian middlemen had kept their own counsel as to the place of market where they obtained the furs they brought down to the French, and the two explorers now learned the secret. The Hurons from the Great Manitoulin also made it a rule to be present at this market, and they divided the trade with the people of Sault.

* Reuben G. Thwaites, in Vol. XI, of the Wisconsin Historical Collections has reprinted the narrative of Radisson's Voyages to the North-West, and has added valuable notes.

Next the explorers visited the Tatarga, who reaped twice a year and who warred against both the Christinos and the Sioux; and they vainly endeavored to get the Hurons to go with them to visit their kinsmen who, driven by the Iroquois, had taken refuge among the streams that flow westward into the Mississippi. They did not however encounter the Sioux. So the summer was passed in wanderings in the country lying between Lake Michigan and Mississippi. Indeed Radisson says that they even reached "the great river that divides itself in two, where the Hurons, with some Ottanake and the wild men that has wars with them had retired. This nation (the Beef) have wars against those of the forked river. It is so called because it has two branches, the one towards the west, the other towards the south, which we believe runs towards Mexico, by the tokens they gave us."*

From the Tatarga also they learned of nations still further to the south who had commerce with the whites, and even saw "beads of gilded pearls" which these Indians obtained from their southern neighbors. Then, urged on by a desire to see the Christinos, they journeyed northward to Green Bay, declining the invitation of the Fire Nation to visit them once more. Pushing on they reached the nation of the Sault, who were then appar-

* Mr. Thwaites, in his *Story of Wisconsin*, and elsewhere claims for Radisson and Groselliers the discovery of the Mississippi, the claim being founded on this passage, and the confirmatory passage in the *Relations of 1680* quoted below. To this it may be answered that Radisson was not at all likely to fail to recognize the importance of such a stream as the Mississippi, had he really seen it. The paragraph quoted stands in the manuscript as an after thought, so to speak, and he refers to the subject as might one who had heard reports that he more than half believed, of a great river. Their claims to the discovery of the Mississippi, or the claims made for them, are not to be compared with those of Joliet and Marquette, who started on the quest of the great river and found it, just as Columbus realized his ideal in the discovery of America.

ently in the country southwest of Lake Superior. There they found some of the French who had started from Three Rivers with them—probably some of the thirteen who were set down as captured at the time of the Iroquois fight. There, too, they met a party of Christinos, and from them got the information about Hudson's Bay which they were afterwards to put to such good use. So passed the winter of 1659-60; and the next spring they returned to Three Rivers with a large and valuable cargo of furs.*

It is true that Radisson, writing from memory in 1667, would seem to have added another year to these first wanderings, but there is no circumstantial account of their travels during the third year; and from both the *Relations* and the *Journal of the Jesuits* we know that they were on the St. Lawrence in the summer of 1660. Indeed Radisson's own mistake in chronology fixes the date of their return, for he mentions passing the Long Sault eight days after the massacre of Dollier de Casson and his party, which occurred May 21, 1660, instead of in 1663, as might be inferred from Radisson's manuscript.

The remainder of the year 1660 and the first half of 1661 was spent by Groseilliers and Radisson at Three

* Winsor says: "There is no question that Groseilliers wintered on the shores of Lake Superior in 1659-60, where he had fallen in with some of the Sioux and had heard of the great river."—Cartier to Frontenac, p. 183. I think that had Radisson and Groseilliers reached even the frozen western end of Lake Superior on their first voyage, Radisson would have said so. At the very least, he would have mentioned a fish course on the extended bill of fare he gives; for fishing through the ice was practiced by the Indians about the lake. On the contrary, this winter of 1659-60 was spent in the forests south-west of Lake Superior. Moreover, Radisson especially says that he did not fall in with the Sioux, and gives reasons why. Mr. Thwaites also has inferred that on this trip the two Frenchmen navigated Lake Superior and visited Sault Ste. Marie. As I read Radisson's account, he definitely says that the Indians of the Sault were then living near the head of the lake. When, in 1661 he reached the Sault, good manners, he says, forbade him to speak to his red companions, the Indians, of the places from which they had been driven.

Rivers and in visits to Quebec, preparing for their contemplated trip to Hudson's Bay. They had already learned enough of the routes to lead them to choose this time the northern passage, by way of St. Mary's river and Lake Superior. For prudential reasons, however, they determined to say as little as possible about their plans;* and thus it happens that while they told something of their previous journey, they took good care to withhold the most important part of the information they had gained. Moreover, it is probable that the two Jesuits who reported what was learned from the adventurers, misquoted them in some particulars. It was therefore only natural that historians who have taken the Jesuit accounts as authentic have fallen into errors without number. One writer has even gone to the length of discrediting Radisson's explicit statements in regard to a second voyage to the northern countries, and insists that but one such expedition was made.† Yet it would seem that whoever studies carefully the narrative that Radisson has left must be convinced of that writer's essential truthfulness.

The Journal of the Jesuits for 1660 quotes Laval as saying that in August of that year he had met at Montreal a party of three hundred Ottawas, who had arrived there on the 19th; and that Groseilliers, who had gone up with them the year before, was of their party; that they had started from Lake Superior with one hun-

* Radisson says that his sister, Groseillier's wife, was the probable source whence the Jesuits obtained their information, a statement to be taken with some allowance.

† Mr. Campbell, in the *Historical Review* article adverted to, lays stress on Radisson's statement that he passed the Long Sault on his return from the second northern voyage. Mr. Scull thinks that the error is due to a disarrangement of Radisson's manuscripts, which were among the papers captured by the Dutch captain of the "Osper" from Col. George Cartwright in 1665.

dred and forty canoes, but that forty had turned back; that Groseilliers had wintered with the Beef tribe, belonging to the sedentary Nadoneceronons [Sioux]; and that Father Menar [Menard] and Father Albanal had gone back with them.* The *Relations* of 1680 report a conversation between the writer and two Frenchmen, which took place at Quebec some time after the first of August of that year. The writer had just before met near Tadoussac an Indian who was returning from an overland journey from Green Bay to Hudson's Bay, and and it is quite possible that he was not careful to discriminate what he learned from the Indian from that he had from the Frenchmen. At all events, he says that his enterprising compatriots had just arrived at Quebec with three hundred Algonquins in sixty canoes laden with peltries; that the Frenchmen had passed the winter on the shores of Lake Superior, and had made several trips to the surrounding tribes. "They saw, among other things, at six days journey beyond the lake to the southwest, a tribe composed of the remainder of the 'Hurons of the Tobacco Nation', compelled by the Iroquois to abandon their country and to bury themselves thus deep in the forests, that they could not be found by their enemies. These poor people, retreating across mountains and over rocks, through the depths of these vast unknown forests, at length happily arrived at a beautiful river, large, wide, deep, and resembling, they

* As to this statement it may be said, first, that it was the practice of the Indians to divide their parties when going through the old Huron country, so as to elude the Iroquois and also to obtain food the easier. Hence the date of the arrival of one flotilla does not fix the date of the descent of all the Indians during the given year; secondly, the vagueness of Laval's report shows that he must have heard of Groseilliers' travels from a third person; third, Laval meant to say that Menard had returned with the Indians and not with Groseilliers. Winsor, Thwaites and others have fallen into error on this point. Campbell corrects the obvious mistake.

say, our great river St. Lawrence. They found upon its shores the great nation of the Abimsec, who received them with great kindness. This nation is composed of sixty villages." Moreover, the two Frenchmen treated the zealous priest to tales of the number of infants they had baptised, gave him material for moralizing by reporting the horrible punishments for adultery in vogue among the Sioux, and also contributed to his fund of information by the statement that this great people burned coal.*

It will be noticed that in these reports there is no mention of the Hudson Bay project. As to the mention of Lake Superior, the Frenchmen might easily have been misunderstood when they said they had passed some time in the Lake Superior country, as they did, and with the people who navigated the lake. Again, while the correspondence in the accounts of the Mississippi found in the *Relations* of 1680 and in Radisson's narrative would fix him as one of the Frenchmen, still both references are too indefinite to admit the certain interpretation that he and Groseilliers actually saw the great river. The information in regard to the Sioux might easily have been obtained from prisoners of that nation or from reports. Moreover, the statements of the Frenchmen were not calculated to lead the Jesuits to hasten to those fierce and cruel people.

As it happened, however, the Jesuits had already determined upon a mission on Lake Superior. When the Indians with whom Groseilliers and Radisson came down were ready to return, on August 28, 1661, they were ac-

* In the face of Radisson's plain statement (p. 158) "We had not as yet seen the nation Nadonecronons," it must be inferred that the reports of the Frenchmen were, in this particular, of what they had heard, and not of what they had seen.

accompanied by Father Rene Menard and his assistant, Jean Guerin. The party took the usual route to Georgian Bay, and thence through St. Mary's river and along the south shore of Lake Superior to Keweenaw Bay, where the father started a mission. In the *Relations* of 1662, 1663 and 1664, Jerome Lalemant tells the pitiful story of the first martyr of the Lake Superior missions. Had not Father Menard's heart been so set upon the triumphs of the cross, and had not his frail body been so sensitive to the trials of the wilderness that he could find no words to describe either the beauties or the natural features of the regions he visited, his name might have been associated in history with the discovery of Lake Superior.* He was the first white man† who is known to have sailed on that lake; but his letters recite only the dangers he underwent and the triumphs of his religion. Lost in the woods, he perished while on a missionary journey; and Jean Guerin survived him but a little more than a year.

In June, 1661, the month in which Father Menard perished in the forests, Groseilliers and Radisson started secretly on their second journey to the north. The reason for this caution is not far to seek.‡ Groseilliers assumed the right to traffic on his own account, and to

* Mr. Campbell, curiously enough, argues that inasmuch as Radisson declares he was the first Christian to see the Grand Portage, therefore he must have been on Lake Superior previous to 1660, the year that Menard certainly passed the Pictured Rocks. Inasmuch as nobody knew of Menard's journey until after his death, Radisson's statement can be impeached without a sacrifice of the writer's veracity. But if Radisson is to be believed so implicitly on this point, why endeavor to make him out a deliberate falsifier without motive?

† It is possible that the Frenchmen, whom Radisson met with the people of the Sault, may have voyaged on Lake Superior; and Menard says that he met some Frenchmen near Keweenaw Bay.

‡ It seems to me absurd to attempt to sweep away all of Radisson's circumstantial narrative of the events that occurred between his first and second voyages.

go to the Indian markets without royal permission. Such a thing was never allowed in New France; and it is no wonder that the governor not only insisted upon sending two of his representatives with them, but also stipulated that half the profits should go to him. This concession Groseilliers would not grant; and as a result the two brothers-in-law had to slip out of the palisade of Three Rivers at night to escape the perfunctory vigilance of the guard.

After the usual trials they reached St. Mary's river and ascended that stream to the Sault. From this point to the head of the lake we follow the two explorers in their delightful journey along the grand and beautiful shores. The treasures of copper, the whirling sands of the Grand Sable;* the echoing caverns of the Pictured Rocks; the meadows and then the portage of Keweenaw Point, all these are described in due order and with a zest and a minuteness which prove not alone that the explorers were then on Lake Superior for the first time, but also that they believed no white man had been there before them. Arriving at Chequamegon Bay, they built a small fort, where they spent the winter. The next spring they visited the Sioux and during the summer they accomplished their original purpose of reaching Hudson's Bay. In 1663, they returned to the St. Lawrence by way of Lake Superior.

On their return Groseilliers was arrested and the two were heavily fined for their temerity in trading with the Indians without a license. This action together with their failure to enlist French capital in their pet project of a Hudson Bay establishment led Groseilliers and Radisson to go over to the English, under the auspices of

* Compare Radisson's description of the Grand Sable with that of Mr. Bela Hubbard in "Memorials of a Half Century," for similarity in impressions.

which nation they finally accomplished their purpose, and as a result of their efforts the Hudson's Bay Company was formed.

The publication of "Radisson's Voyages" seems to establish the following facts: Groseilliers and Radisson were the Frenchmen mentioned in the Relations of 1660 as having wintered on the shores of Lake Superior during the winter of 1658-9, but they did not actually reach that lake until 1661; Father Menard was the first white man who is known to have navigated the great lake, but he gave no information of his discoveries, and his acquaintance with its shores was limited to less than half the distance of the southern coast; Groseilliers and Radisson were the real discoverers of Lake Superior, having made note of the essential features of the lake from its foot to its head.

Such in brief is the order of the discovery of Lake Superior as I have been able to trace it in "Radisson's Travels"; and in reaching the conclusions given above I have gone on the theory that Radisson's own writings are the best evidence as to when and where he went. The mistakes that have been made by other writers seem to have been occasioned either by the fact that Radisson's reports were not available at the time when they wrote; or else because they have preferred rather to follow the information given in the *Relations* and in the *Journal of the Jesuits*—information professedly obtained at second hand and from persons who have had a motive for concealing the facts,—than to take Radisson's narrative and endeavor to explain his mistakes in the light of present knowledge.

